Forum: SHC Commission
Issue: Violence against women
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Introduction

The issue of violence against women is one of the oldest issues known to man. Only in the past 50 years however, has violence against women come to the attention of governments and NGOs across the globe. It is crucial to underline the fact that all countries are affected by the issue, albeit to varying degrees, making it a truly international problem that all nations must strive to solve. The UN's Human Rights Council (HRC) will consequently be trying, over the course of ILYMUN, to reach a resolution to which all countries can agree and work with to improve lives of countless women around the world.

Definition of Key Terms

Violence: Violence is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a person, or against a group or community (in this case women), that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, underdevelopment or deprivation. This definition associates intentionality with the committing of the act itself, irrespective of the outcome it produces.

Women: female human being. The term can be used to designate both children and adults. Women account for about 50% of the world's population, or 3.5 billion individuals – addressing the issue is consequently a matter of international importance, affecting a huge group of people.

The United Nations General Assembly, in Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, defines **violence against women** as "any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

Acts of violence include, but are not limited to: acid throwing, breast ironing, bride burning, dating and domestic violence, dowry death, honour killing, female genital mutilation, foot binding, forced abortion, forced pregnancy, forced prostitution and human trafficking, rape and sexual slavery. Perpetrators include, but are not limited to: partners, mobs, criminal organisations, and the State.

Background information

Deplorable acts against women have plagued both ancient and modern society since the dawn of civilisation and are the most common acts of violence know to man: they transcend age, location, countries and cultures. They result of a historical imbalance in male-female power relationships: this has led to a discrimination and subjugation of womankind in order to prevent its full advancement. Consequently, violence against women is a vector to maintain the woman in the position of subordinate to the man. It is only recently that attitudes have started to change concerning this issue.

Understanding the causes of this violence is key to preventing it. The issue can be traced back to the early civilisations: Mesopotamian Marriage Law was very similar to property transaction (see Hammurabi's Code), even slavery. The subjugated status of womankind was passed down through the generations, and can be found in passages of the modern Christian Bible, Judaism's Torah, and Islam's Qur'an : conservative interpretations of verse Surah, An-Nisa, 34 suggest the acceptability of domestic violence and women are decreed "made for man" in Corinthians 11;9-8. This conditioning of young males to view women as inferior and objects of their will, combined with their physical strength is a possible explanation of the violence against women.

The consequences for women and society as a whole are terrible. In a report dated November 2012, the World Health Organisation describes the impacts of violence to women: victims of sexual abuse often have long-term physical, sexual and mental problems (including but not limited to sexually transmitted diseases, post-traumatic stress disorder and increased alcohol and drug use). Furthermore, children who witness forms of domestic violence often suffer from emotional disturbances later in life, as well as sometimes going on to perpetrate or experience violence themselves. Lastly, society as a whole suffers from the phenomenon: women become isolated because of violence, and become unable to work or look after their children. The ripple effect throughout society can lead to economic and social decline: one must remember that women represent on average about half of a country's population, and depriving it of such an asset would be an act of folly.

Major Countries and Organisations involved

As a global issue, all countries are involved to some extent with the issue. It is however possible to determine patterns and contrasts globally. For instance, countries in which violence against women is particularly widespread and remains unchecked include countries whose judicial system is based on Islamic, or even sometimes Sharia, law – regions such as the Middle-East and Africa are particularly affected by the issue. The global pattern of violence against women broadly follows the world's development pattern – less developed countries are affected by the issue to a greater extent than more developed countries.

Organisations and governments are trying to promote gender equality in the developing world to prevent violence against women include Ban Ki-Moon's UNiTE campaign, and various charities around the world. Furthermore, governments have developed specific ministries and councils to deal with the issue such as the Government Equalities Office in the UK or the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in the European Parliament.

Relevant UN treaties and events

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women

Articles 1, 2, 3, 5 and 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Previous Attempts to solve the issue

Many countries have written their own laws to prevent violence against women, but the problem remains that not all countries are able to enforce or simply pass these laws: a UN blanket resolution would homogenise and clarify legislation concerning the issue on an international level.

Possible Solutions

-Prevention campaigns changing society's mentalities
-Give women a voice to enable them to denounce violence against them

Bibliography

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